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# From Graceful and Feminine to Silenced: The Study of Female Representations in Levantine Rock Art De graciles et féminines à muettes : l'étude des représentations féminines dans l'art levantin

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## **From Graceful and Feminine to Silenced: The Study of Female Representations in Levantine Rock Art**

### ***De grâces et féminines à muettes : l'étude des représentations féminines dans l'art levantin***

Margarita DÍAZ-ANDREU, Laura FERNÁNDEZ MACÍAS, Neemias SANTOS DA ROSA

**Abstract:** Since the start of research into post-Palaeolithic Levantine art in the eastern Iberian Peninsula in the early twentieth century, the study of female figures was heavily conditioned by gender stereotypes and a clear androcentric bias, which characterised the interpretation of the past and has conditioned research until quite recently. This continued throughout much of the century, although we shall see that there is an increasing number of women involved in studying this art, and alternative proposals have finally been put forth since the last decade of the twentieth century. We shall divide our analysis on the authors that published on female representations into four periods: from the earliest studies until the mid-twentieth century, from then until the end of the Franco dictatorship, from 1975 until 2000, and, partly dovetailing with this last period, from 1990 until today, when feminist ideology and the emergence of gender archaeology came to the fore.

**Keywords:** Levantine rock art, female figure, activity, feminism, gender archaeology.

**Résumé :** L'art levantin, de style post-paléolithique et réalisé dans des sites rupestres à l'air libre situés dans les régions montagneuses parallèles à la Méditerranée, est unique par sa représentation naturaliste de figures humaines et animales. Dans cet article, nous allons analyser les interprétations des figures féminines issues de cette tradition artistique en tentant de relier les affirmations de plusieurs auteurs à l'idéologie de genre dominante à l'époque de leur réalisation.

Nous distinguerons quatre étapes. Lors de la première, qui s'étend de 1908 à 1950, nous examinerons les propositions d'Henri Breuil, de Juan Cabré Aguiló, du marquis de Cerralbo et de Juan Bautista Porcar. L'absence de chercheuses s'explique par l'interdiction qui était faite aux femmes, jusqu'en 1910, de suivre des études à l'université, mais aussi par le refus des professeurs universitaires de les former au travail sur le terrain. La seule exception pour cette période sera Encarnación Cabré Herreros, fille de J. Cabré Aguiló. Néanmoins, parmi ses publications, ce qui se rapproche le plus de notre sujet est en lien avec l'art paléolithique. C'est pourquoi, nous ne ferons que mentionner son travail. Le plus ouvert des auteurs est le marquis de Cerralbo. Son texte étant un prologue, le marquis n'était pas tenu de respecter la norme de la neutralité scientifique. Il percevait la femme représentée dans l'art levantin comme fertile, religieuse, idéaliste, au service de l'homme, fidèle à son époux, pudique (car portant une jupe) et gracile (en opposition aux femmes à la taille épaisse que l'on pouvait voir, selon lui, dans d'autres parties de l'Europe). Ceux qui le suivirent imaginèrent, comme lui, les femmes levantines comme étant passives : elles ne participaient pas à la chasse, ni à la guerre, mais à la cueillette et quasiment tous s'accordaient à dire qu'elles dansaient.

Ces idées dominèrent encore pendant la deuxième étape, de 1950 à 1975, bien que les études réalisées sur ces figures soient devenues plus systématiques. À ce moment-là, les premières femmes qui avaient pu suivre une formation d'archéologue commencèrent à réaliser des travaux sur le terrain en lien avec l'art rupestre, mais toujours en compagnie de membres de leur famille. Si elles parvenaient à publier, leurs écrits reflétaient l'idéologie de l'époque : ainsi, elles sous-estimaient explicitement leur travail en le décrivant comme une « petite nouvelle », un « progrès » ou un « petit travail ». Deux professeurs d'université, Martín Almagro et Antonio Beltrán, publièrent une synthèse sur les figures féminines ; cet ouvrage, dans lequel le parti pris androcentrique est évident, allait avoir de l'influence pendant plusieurs générations.

La troisième période analysée débute à la fin de la dictature franquiste en Espagne, en 1975, et se termine au moment du changement de siècle. Quatre auteurs sont allés au-delà du caractère exclusif concernant les synthèses réalisées par des enseignants universitaires. Les deux premiers auteurs, Anna Alonso et Alexandre Grimal, écrivirent d'excellents textes, dont l'influence sur d'autres auteurs fut considérablement réduite par le type de publication choisi pour présenter leurs idées : une revue locale. Toutefois, un résumé fut diffusé sous forme d'article de vulgarisation. A. Alonso et A. Grimal furent les deux premiers auteurs à dresser un inventaire des figures et à présenter des statistiques. Ils observèrent ainsi que les représentations féminines sont moins diversifiées que le sont les autres sujets et ils confirmèrent que la jupe est l'élément principal permettant de reconnaître les femmes. Ils soulignèrent également que le rôle principal de l'art levantin est accordé à l'homme (en particulier l'archer) et à l'animal (certains d'entre eux), et non à la femme.

Un autre inventaire, réalisé à la même période, est celui de Concepción Martínez Murillo qui se limita à la documentation des archives Gil Carles, soit 127 sites, dont seuls 24 comportaient des figures de femmes, les motifs féminins représentant uniquement 4,4 % de l'ensemble des représentations. Cette autrice signala par ailleurs que certaines femmes étaient impliquées dans des scènes sociales telles qu'une conversation. Le dernier auteur que nous évoquerons pour cette période est Miguel Angel Mateo Saura. Ce dernier s'opposa aux premières publications aux positions explicitement féministes qui commencèrent à voir le jour à cette époque et qu'il jugeait erronées et sans fondement. Malgré cela, et tout en reconnaissant qu'il ne possédait pas les données nécessaires, il signala une paternité masculine de l'art et interpréta plusieurs scènes sous un angle mythologique. Cette étape montre la façon dont les débats relatifs aux droits de la femme, si importants lors des premières années de l'étape démocratique, influencèrent les chercheurs et les chercheuses qui, sans se considérer comme féministes, cherchaient à préciser l'image de la femme dans le passé.

La quatrième et dernière étape de notre synthèse chevauche en partie la précédente, car elle va des années 1990 à nos jours, mais elle s'en distingue par l'autodéfinition comme féministes de quatre autrices. Une distinction est toutefois établie entre les deux premières chercheuses, que nous associons à la deuxième vague du féminisme, dont l'influence se fit sentir en Espagne jusqu'aux années 1990, et les deux dernières, plus proches des positions défendues du point de vue de l'archéologie du genre. L'analyse de l'œuvre prolifique de Trinidad Escoriza ouvre le débat, avec une approche sociale militante et antisexistes. Celle-ci dénonçait l'absence de représentation des activités réalisées par les femmes dans l'art, comme la reproduction et la production d'aliments, ce qu'elle considérait comme une forme de légitimation du patriarcat ou comme « l'expression de l'idéologie patriarcale ». La deuxième autrice, Carme Olària, s'approche de la thématique mythologique, que nous avons observée chez M. Saura, en envisageant ouvertement la possibilité que l'art rupestre ait été réalisé par des femmes, tout en proposant des interprétations, de notre point de vue, parfois quelque peu risquées. L'une des autrices du présent article, Margarita Díaz-Andreu (1999), a publié un essai dans lequel elle émet l'hypothèse suivante : soit la représentation du genre n'était pas importante dans l'art levantin (puisqu'un grand nombre de figures sont asexuées), soit, au contraire, elle l'était, car il pourrait sembler évident que toutes les figures, ou quasiment toutes, pouvaient représenter des hommes. Elle suggère que l'art levantin était peut-être effectivement une expression masculine, ce qui ne veut pas dire que les femmes étaient nécessairement discriminées, mais tout simplement que ce n'était pas le langage qu'elles employaient pour s'exprimer. Elle avance également l'hypothèse selon laquelle, alors que presque tous les sites pourraient être englobés dans cette vision, seuls quelques-uns étaient réservés aux femmes. Selon elle, il serait nécessaire d'aller plus loin et d'analyser l'emplacement des sites et l'iconographie qui y est représentée afin d'envisager cette possibilité. La dernière autrice, María Lillo, est la seule à passer de nouveau en revue l'inventaire des représentations féminines et à confirmer une fois encore la plus grande proportion de figures masculines et d'archers, et le fait que seuls neuf sites sur soixante-douze comportent une majorité de motifs féminins. Mais, selon l'autrice, il ne s'agit pas d'« inverser les stéréotypes, c'est-à-dire de s'obstiner à dire que les femmes chassaient, guerroyaient ou que le pouvoir patriarcal s'est instauré après un idyllique patriarcat primitif » (Lillo Bernabeu, 2014, p. 283). Pour terminer, l'article propose plusieurs possibilités de recherches sur les représentations féminines dans l'art levantin.

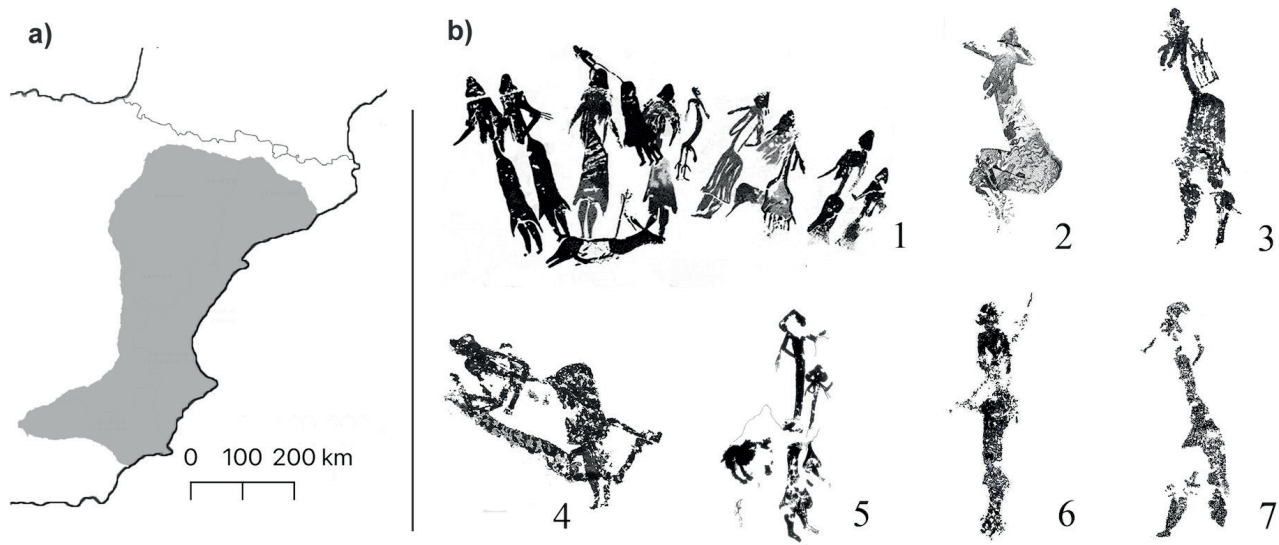
**Mots-clés :** art levantin, figure féminine, activité, féminisme, féministe, archéologie du genre.

## INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the different approaches to female figures in Levantine rock art (fig. 1) over the course of more than one hundred years in the history of research in this pictorial tradition on the eastern Iberian Peninsula. Levantine rock art is found in open-air shelters located in a wide mountainous area in the eastern part of Spain, from the Pyrenees to the provinces of Jaén and Almería. The images exhibit a naturalistic aspect and motifs usually painted in red, and less frequently in either black or white. Human, animal and other figures are represented alone or together forming narrative scenes of hunting, war and dances, among others. Despite many shared features, there is also regional and diachronic variation (Domingo,

2015). The chronology of the Levantine style has been a matter of disagreement among researchers for more than a century since its discovery. Currently, the main point of discrepancy lies in dating its origin. While some date it in the Epimagdalenian (Ruiz et al., 2022), the Epipalaeolithic or Mesolithic (Viñas et al., 2016; Mateo Saura, 2019), a last group of authors propose its appearance to the early Neolithic (Villaverde et al., 2012; López-Montalvo, 2018). However, there is an agreement that at least part of its chronological development took part during the Neolithic period (5500-4000 BC).

Even though there are several earlier compilations (see especially Escoriza, 2002 and Lillo, 2014, and Barciela and Lillo, 2022, in relation to women working in rock art), the contribution of this article is the context of these studies of the female figure within the evolution



**Fig. 1 – a)** Map of eastern Spain. The shaded area corresponds to the area where Levantine art is located; **b)** Female representations in Levantine rock art: 1. La Roca dels Moros in Cogul (Viñas et al., 2017, p. 116); 2. Covetes del Puntal (Viñas, 1982, p. 165); 3. Barranc de les Taules I (Sarrià Boscovich, 2016; Unpublished); 4. Cova Centelles (motif 251; Morote et al., 2019, p. 255); 5. Abrigo de la Risca I (Mateo Saura, 2003, fig. 3); 6. La Vacada (37; Martínez Bea, 2009, p. 68); 7. Cova del Civil (62b y 78; López Montalvo, 2007, p. 548).

**Fig. 1 – a)** Carte de l'est de l'Espagne. La zone grisée correspond à la zone où se trouve l'art levantin ; **b)** représentations féminines dans l'art rupestre levantin : 1. La Roca dels Moros à Cogul (Viñas et al., 2017, p. 116) ; 2. Covetes del Puntal (Viñas, 1982, p. 165) ; 3. Barranc de les Taules I (Sarrià, 2016, non publié) ; 4. Cova Centelles (motif 251; Morote et al., 2019, p. 255) ; 5. Abrigo de la Risca I (Mateo Saura, 2003, fig. 3) ; 6. La Vacada (37 ; Martínez Bea, 2009, p. 68) ; 7. Cova del Civil (62b y 78 ; López Montalvo, 2007, p. 548).

of the ideology around women from the period in which each of the visions we discuss throughout the article was expressed. Thus, we divide our history into four periods, the last two of which overlap somewhat; specifically, they span from 1909 to the mid-twentieth century, from then until the end of the Franco dictatorship, from 1975 until the new millennium and, reaching back a bit, from 1990 until today.

## 1. 1908-1950: WOMEN FROM THE PAST WITHOUT WOMEN FROM THE PRESENT

### 1.1 First steps:

#### Henri Breuil and Juan Cabré Aguiló

Levantine art was discovered 130 years ago, even though the first finds in the nineteenth century went virtually unnoticed (Díaz-Andreu, 2012a). Only after the authenticity of the palaeolithic rock art discoveries in Altamira was accepted (Cartailhac, 1902) and studied (Cartailhac and Breuil, 1906) did an interest in seeking and publishing prehistoric art arise among Spanish scholars, partly driven by the person who published the most those years, the French abbot H. Breuil. One of the first sites to be identified was La Roca de los Moros in Cogul (Lleida), about which H. Breuil (1908, p. 12-13) said:

“The last group we have to discuss is a scene from the social life of those ancient times: nine half-dressed

women in short, narrow skirts are arranged near a little black man wearing little more than suspenders<sup>(1)</sup>, with his sex clearly marked; because the women’s breasts hang pendulously from their chests, he must have been nude. [...] This is probably a dance of women around a man, similar to what is done among many savages today; perhaps an initiation ceremony.”

One year later, he explained that:

“It does indeed seem to be a dance, or some similar ceremony in which nine ‘ladies’ surround a man, perhaps performing some initiation rite. This would be a dance of the kind that Stow<sup>(2)</sup> reports, intended to celebrate the creative power of Kaang. In them, a Bushman sorcerer personifying the god is surrounded by a group of women dancing frenetically, on whom the procreative act is imposed one by one” (Breuil and Cabré Aguiló, 1909, p. 19).

And he ended the article by explaining that:

“The hunting panels at Cogul show a historical, scenic episode previously unknown in rock art. The scene of the ‘ladies’ and the man lifts a small corner of the veil that conceals the social life of these long-ago peoples, and the costumes tell us something of the still-unknown fashions in which the Magdalenian seamstresses used the fine-eyed needles that the caves of the Cantabrians, the Pyrenees and the Dordogne have yielded for so long, to the astonishment of researchers” (Breuil and Cabré Aguiló, 1909, p. 19-21).

As we can see, the ideology of the period influenced his interpretation of the scene, which Breuil believed to

be of Palaeolithic chronology: women are associated with sewing (the possibility that the man had sewn the skirts is not considered), fertility, frenetic dance and sexuality. Shortly after, this type of idea is repeated in relation to the rock art site La Cueva de la Vieja (Albacete), where the question is whether a rather unclear object being held by a woman might be a fertility idol (Breuil et al., 1912, p. 557), something that H. Breuil's assistant who was later an independent researcher, J. Cabré Aguiló (1915, p. 198), took for granted.

Henri Breuil continued publishing on Levantine art, mostly until shortly after the end of the First World War, and thereafter he only occasionally returned to the topic, always alongside his friend Hugo Obermaier. However, H. Breuil was not the only one to publish on it, given that an increasing number of researchers were emerging in Spain (Díaz-Andreu, 2012a) and many new sites were being discovered. In a preliminary synthesis of this art, J. Cabré Aguiló, who also dated the Levantine style in the Palaeolithic, created a typology of figures and suggested a chronology based on the motifs in the shelters of La Vieja, Queso and Tortosillas into which he placed all the typically Levantine human representations – including the two women from the first cavity mentioned – in the two central phases of the Levantine chronostylistic sequence (Cabré Aguiló, 1915, plate 23). Therefore, this author believed that female figures had a chronology more limited in time than animal motifs, although he reached no definitive conclusions.

### **1.2. Enrique de Aguilera y Gamboa, Marquis of Cerralbo**

In this initial period, what stands out is a text that is unique and exceptional due to its definition and interpretation of the female Levantine figures. It is the prologue written by the Marquis of Cerralbo (E. de Aguilera y Gamboa) in the J. Cabré Aguiló book just mentioned above. The ideas harboured in it enable us to glimpse what must have been the most antiquated ideology regarding women at that time (we should bear in mind that the author was a leading figure in the Carlist party, one of the most traditional ideologies at that time; Barril, 2009). This first excerpt suffices to give an idea:

“Woman, that charming last act of divine Creation, the ideal emblem of Nature; beautiful conqueror of solitude; divine multiplier of beings who serves, praises and blesses God; foundation of the Fatherland, sublime enchantress, who idealises men's sensibility; this was also woman to the Iberians, from that age when men started being men; in contrast to the women in the other primitive peoples, who were merely female, the Spanish man took woman into his Paradise for her to be more, to be his peerless companion, his wife” (Marquis of Cerralbo, 1915, p. 6).

The author is pleased that due to the skirts they are wearing, the representations show the “divine sentiment of modesty” of the Spanish woman even during the Palaeolithic, who kept herself “like a veiled treasure for the

man chosen for the privilege of their love” (Marquis of Cerralbo, 1915, p. 8). He also congratulates their svelte shape, which distinguishes them from the stocky, nude European women (Marquis of Cerralbo, 1915, p. 7), no doubt thinking of figures like the Venus of Willendorf, published just a few years earlier. As mentioned above, the Marquis' text is an anomaly in the literature of his day: almost all archaeological publications in those years were scientific, and it is essential to note that this type of information is only found in places like this one, a prologue, or perhaps a preface, whose purpose was not basic research. The rest of the book, and the articles published by the author of the book (Cabré Aguiló) and others who were striving at the time to expand knowledge of rock art in Spain, sought to use more the neutral language of science. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain how the women of the past were truly imagined, unless their subconscious betrayed them. One example of the latter is José Ramón Mélida, an archaeology professor at the University of Madrid between 1912 and 1928, who mentioned in his manual on Palaeolithic art that “men were primarily thought to make sculptures representing nude women, and later paintings” (Mélida, 1929-2004, p. 11), thus assuming that the artists were naturally men. Without saying so explicitly, these assumptions turn prehistoric women into secondary creatures and objects.

### **1.3 Juan Bautista Porcar**

A first study exclusively focused on female Levantine figures in the Ares del Maestre region dates from before the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) it was published in 1940. The author, the painter J.B. Porcar, had gotten his start in research alongside H. Obermaier and H. Breuil (Porcar, 1934). He began his text by outlining his observation that the sexual motifs come from the more archaic times and are smaller in size. He chose the female figures due to the presence of skirts, acknowledging that “I've seen nothing to date that recalls a parallel with the breasts of fertility of the Ladies of Cogul” (Porcar, 1940, p. 163), but he thought he saw something in the figures that represented breasts, which were not marked for some “psychological or moral” reason. Indeed, he saw a “graceful, feminine beauty” in them (Porcar, 1940, p. 164). The fact that he dated the figures in the Mesolithic did not seem to affect the interpretation, and no comment was explicitly made about this in his text. Therefore, we see that these early researchers' interpretation of the female Levantine figures reveals a traditional and highly conservative vision in line with the ideological context of their day.

### **1.4 The context: The ideology about women in the first half of the twentieth century**

It is easy to answer the question about why no women were publishing on Levantine rock art at that time: women in Spain were not officially allowed to pursue higher education until 1910 (Montero, 2010) and therefore were not able to be part of the institutionalisation of prehistory that

was occurring at that time in the university, until at least until the end of that decade and the early 1920s (Díaz-Andreu and Cortadella, 2006). Thus, it was not until this latter decade that we find the first woman joining archaeology museums, a feat followed by four other women in the ensuing years (Díaz-Andreu, 2002a, p. 57-58). None of them combined their activity with fieldwork, which made it impossible for them to be involved in studying rock art. Yet they were no exception: the oral testimony from the 1920s and 1930s shows that the prehistory chair at the university of Madrid, H. Obermaier, did not take his students to do fieldwork as he viewed them as “disruptive elements” (Díaz-Andreu, 2002a, p. 59), and it is unlikely that the archaeology chair, J.R. Mélida, set foot in the field very often (Caballero Rodríguez and Álvarez, 2011, p. 423-424). With regard to the other chair, Pere Bosch Gimpera, it is equally unclear whether he excavated much during those years<sup>(3)</sup>. The only woman who managed to gain field experience studying rock art during that period was Encarnación Cabré Herreros, thanks to the fact that her father, J. Cabré Aguiló, took the entire family on excavations, even when she was little. However, by the time she had completed her university education in 1932, J. Cabré Aguiló had not studied Levantine art for many years and instead devoted herself to Celtic archaeology and to something regarded as highly unfeminine at the time: their armaments (Cabré Aguiló and Cabré Herreros, 1931; Cabré Aguiló et al., 1932). Yet after the discovery of Palaeolithic painting in Cueva de los Casares (Saelices, Guadalajara) in the 1930s, she helped her father document it (Cabré Aguiló, 1934). J. Cabré Aguiló stated that:

“[...] I went back once again to Riba de Saelices with my wife and two children to help each other in our work in the Cueva de los Casares, and with the necessary study material. This effort lasted until 3 September, working intensely with my daughter María de la Encarnación, to whom we owe all the calques of cave engravings and paintings and the drawings, which I have reproduced after they were later made in the same size as the calques in Madrid” (Cabré Aguiló, 1998, p. 43).

Almost all the publications on this cave are by J. Cabré Aguiló, although his daughter also wrote several (Cabré Herreros, 1935; Cabré Aguiló and Cabré Herreros, 1936; see, too, Barciela and Lillo, 2022).

## 2. 1950-1975: THE FIRST FEMALE SCHOLARS OF LEVANTINE ART AND MEN’S PERSPECTIVES FROM THE LAST THIRD OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The drive to integrate women into the professional world prior to the Spanish Civil War, especially in the 1930s, did not come to a complete halt, although it was certainly less vigorous after the war. Women continued to largely choose degrees in the faculties of philosophy and humanities, and that is where prehistoric archaeology was being studied at more and more Spanish universities.

It was also the time when it was becoming more common for women to learn field archaeology, which we can see, for example, by their participation in the courses in Ampurias (fig. 6.9 in Díaz-Andreu, 2012b) and journeys abroad, especially those whose purpose was to study with Nino Lamboglia (Gandolfi, 2004), along with excursions (fig. 2) and excavations (fig. 3). The women who wanted to work as professionals during that period came upon many impediments: by law, female civil servants – that is, those with important jobs at universities and museums – were forced to give up their jobs when they married. The impossibility of making the professional and personal facets of their lives compatible largely explains the hiatus in women’s incorporation into paid jobs, at least until 1961, when this ban was lifted.

### 2.1. María Luisa Vilaseca Borrás and Julia Sánchez Carrilero

Even though they did not strictly publish on female figures, we want to highlight the first two women to conduct field research related to Levantine rock art during these years, specifically in the 1940s and 1950s, in both cases because of the support of their respective fathers. The first is María Luisa Vilaseca Borrás (Catalan name: Maria Lluïsa Vilaseca Borràs), who accompanied her father (fig. 3), the physician and distinguished amateur archaeologist Salvador Vilaseca Anguera. She published on some Catalan sites (Vilaseca Borrás, 1953-1954) but was not the author of any of the articles related to rock art, even though her father acknowledged her in a footnote by saying that “Luisa Vilaseca Borrás, graduate in History, provided technical assistance” (Vilaseca Anguera, 1947).

The second woman is Julia Sánchez Carrilero (fig. 4), who published an 80-page text whose introduction ends with these words that downplay the value of her own study:

“Concluding this minor study, we should note that when writing it, we were solely driven by the desire to provide a brief report or preview for a subsequent, more painstaking study of the rock paintings in Nerpio, and we should note that the drawings should not be given any more importance than a purely orientative purpose on topography and iconography<sup>(4)</sup> in the little caves[...]” (Sánchez Carrilero, 1956-1961, p. 4-5).

Her identification of the female figures, that she did not date, does not differ from those of previous authors, as she also used skirts and breasts for her diagnosis. As she explains:

“The female representations are executed somewhat gracefully and freely, in a pose as if dancing; they are wearing skirts and their arms are decorated with bracelets at elbow level. One of them is wearing a hairpiece with a kind of wig on her head[...]” (Sánchez Carrilero, 1956-1961, p. 4).

A more in-depth study of the site was not undertaken until a much later date by another female researcher, Anna Alonso, who offered comments on women similar to the preceding ones, yet adding that “no object that can



**Fig. 2** – Visit to La Gasulla by an international group organised in 1950 after the course in Ampurias. Of the 25 participants, only 12 of them have been recognised, 9 of them men (60% of all men) and 3 women (30%). Notice the average age difference between the men (older) and the women (younger) in the group, which reflects their different status: the majority of men were renowned professionals, while the women were students. The women identified include two Spaniards, María Luisa Vilaseca (the third from the left in the middle row, between John Evans and Martín Almagro) and Mercedes Montañola (in the centre of the photo).

*Fig. 2 – Visite de La Gasulla par un groupe international en 1950 après les cours d'archéologie à Ampurias.*

*Sur les 25 participants, seuls 12 ont été reconnus, dont 9 hommes (60 % des hommes) et 3 femmes (30 %).*

*Remarquez la différence d'âge moyen entre les hommes (plus âgés) et les femmes (plus jeunes) du groupe, qui reflète leur statut : la majorité des hommes étaient des professionnels reconnus, tandis que les femmes étaient des étudiantes.*

*Parmi les femmes identifiées figurent deux Espagnoles, María Luisa Vilaseca (dans la rangée du milieu, la troisième en partant de la gauche, entre John Evans et Martín Almagro) et Mercedes Montañola (au centre de la photo).*

be interpreted as a bow or similar weapon can be seen near these figures” (Alonso, 1980, p. 216). Regarding the activity, she only mentioned the dancing and included a figure with different female representations (1980, p. 190).

## 2.2. Martín Almagro and Antonio Beltrán

Given that only a minority of women taught at the university at the time, and those who did were only able to hold temporary jobs which were poorly paid, at least until the 1960s<sup>(5)</sup>, it is not difficult to understand why all the syntheses on Levantine rock art were written by men. In his *Arte prehistórico*, Martín Almagro dated Levantine art in the Mesolithic, although he pointed out that the lifestyle was “identical to that of the Palaeolithic” (Almagro, 1946, p. 65). This author noted that many women are depicted in pairs (Almagro, 1946, p. 68 and

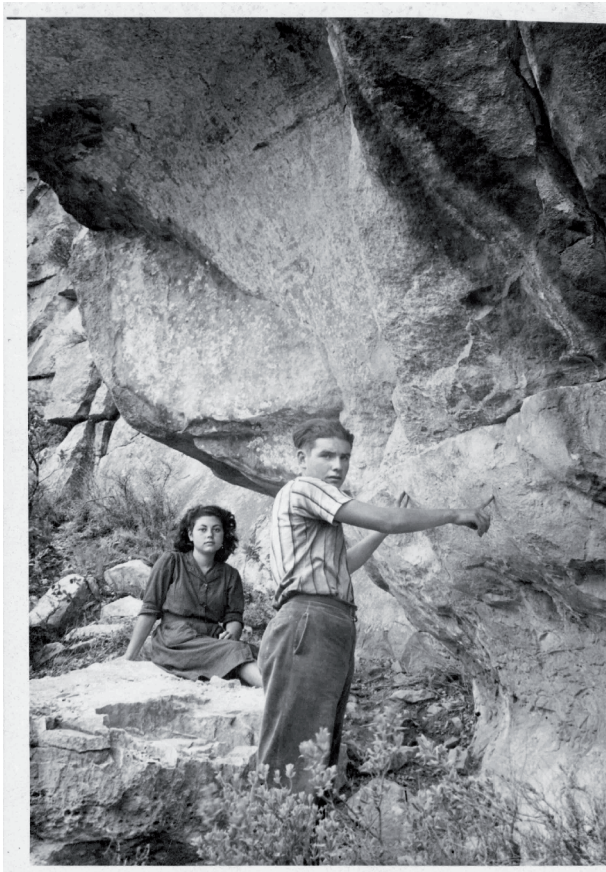
83), an observation that was repeated by another university chair from Barcelona, Luis Pericot, in his synthesis published shortly thereafter (Pericot, 1950, p. 31), a synthesis in which he tried to maintain a neutral stance regarding chronology, but he still seemed inclined to date them in the Palaeolithic. In his book, L. Pericot described how some women looked nude, and referred to another woman who was holding a child’s hand, thus showing “one of the most familiar domestic scenes among all the Levantine scenes” (Pericot, 1950, p. 36). Another chair, Antonio Beltrán, wrote a synthesis used by several generations of students (Beltrán, 1968). In it he mentioned that it would be possible that the art had its origins at the end of the Palaeolithic, and continued during the Mesolithic and even during the Neolithic (*ibid.*, p. 14). Shortly before his synthesis was published, he came out with a scant two-page article particularly devoted to female representations (Beltrán, 1966). In it, A. Beltrán stated that:

“Thus, the sex is clearly marked on countless nude male figures, but its lack does not mean we can be certain that the asexual beings are women. Breasts, protruding and voluminous buttocks, skirts and in some cases hair and the type of work are, however, a failsafe indication

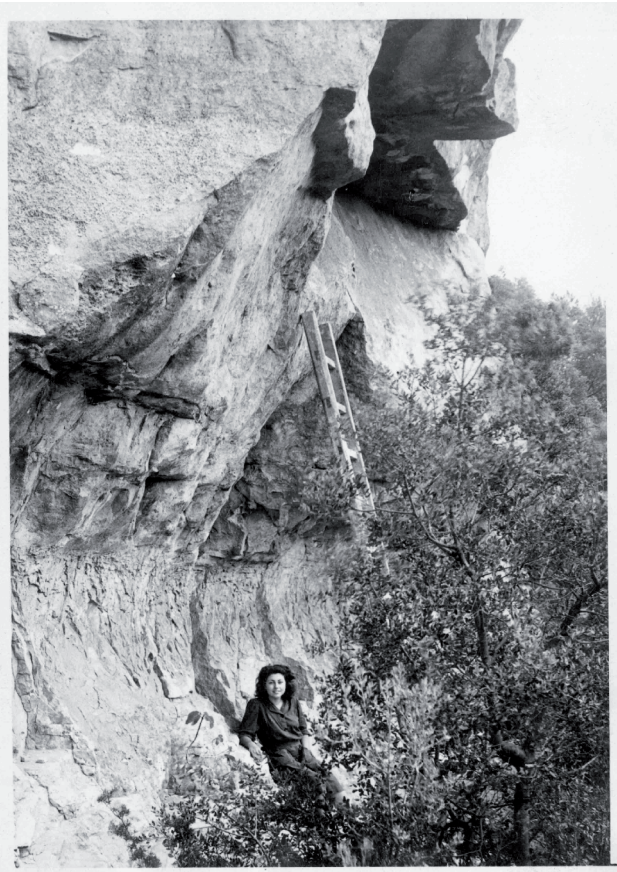
of female representation, as is the absence of weapons or male instruments” (Beltrán, 1966, p. 90).

Furthermore, he divided the female representations into three types, Alpera, Cogul and Dos Aguas, and described them as shown in table 1.

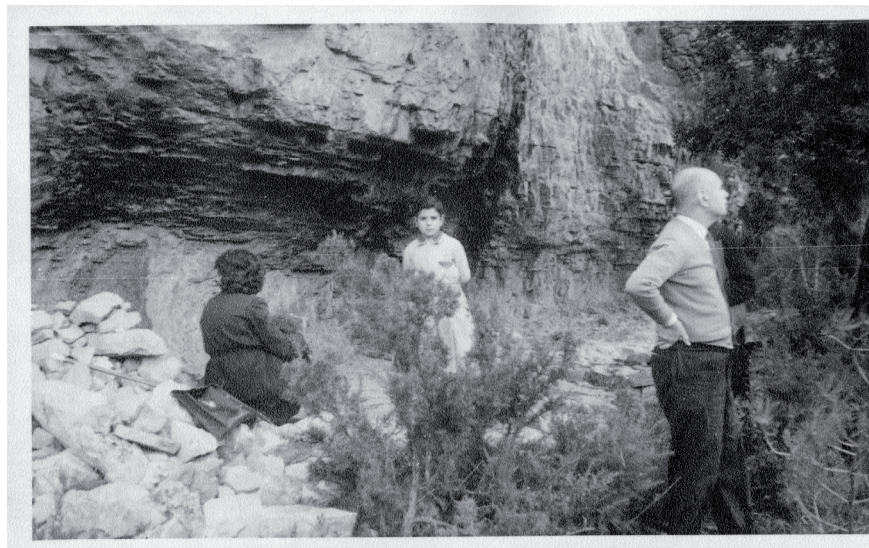
a)



b)



c)



**Fig. 3** – María Luisa Vilaseca in a) Mas d'en Llort (1943); b) Portell de les Lletres (1943); c) Mas d'en Ramon d'en Bessó (c. 1950; sources: Centre de la Imatge Mas Iglesias de Reus, Fons Museu de Reus, unknown author, with permission).

**Fig. 3** – *María Luisa Vilaseca* a) à Mas d'en Llort (1943) ; b) à Portell de les Lletres (1943) ; c) à Mas d'en Ramon d'en Bessó (vers 1950 ; sources : Centre de la Imatge Mas Iglesias de Reus, Fons Museu de Reus, auteur inconnu, avec autorisation).





**Fig. 4** – Julia (1925-2016) and Nieves (1922-) Sánchez Carrilero excavating at the Hoya de Santa Ana (Albacete), an excavation overseen by their father, Joaquín Sánchez Jiménez, director of the Provincial Archaeology Museum of Albacete (source: J. Sánchez Jiménez collection, Museum of Albacete, with permission).

**Fig. 4** – Julia (1925-2016) et Nieves (1922-) Sánchez Carrilero en train de fouiller à la Hoya de Santa Ana (Albacete), une fouille supervisée par leur père, Joaquín Sánchez Jiménez, directeur du Musée provincial d'archéologie d'Albacete (sources : collection J. Sánchez Jiménez, Musée d'Albacete, avec autorisation).

	<b>Alpera</b>	<b>Cogul</b>	<b>Dos Aguas</b>
Breasts	Clear	Pendulous	Highly visible
Skirts	Straight	Flared	Wide/dress
Buttocks	Protruding	-	
Hair	Pulled back	Triangular or pyriform	-
Adornments	-	-	Belts, feathers of pendants, wands or rods

**Table 1** – Division of types of female representations according to A. Beltrán (1966).

**Tabl. 1** – Division des types de représentations féminines, selon A. Beltrán (1966).

Curiously, A. Beltrán did not retain this typology in his synthesis published just two years later, *Arte Rupestre Levantino*, in which he mentioned that female activities were limited to dance and gathering and that they were never associated with weapons, that they are less frequent than male figures and were sometimes difficult to identify. He also stressed that the asexual figures were not women (Beltrán, 1968, p. 10, 45, 46). Years later, however, he again revisited that typology (Beltrán, 1988).

### 2.3. The gist of the period: dependence

What we see in the years discussed in this period, 1950-1975, therefore, is that even though women's professional engagement in professionalisation and involvement in archaeological fieldwork increased, it always occurred through dependence: they never achieved a status similar to that of their male colleagues (unless they worked alone in a museum, where no one could

stop them), and, at least in rock art research, they always depended on older family members or professors if they did engage in fieldwork. They naturalised this dependence either by not publishing or, if they did publish, never writing syntheses which are later cited, and almost apologising for what they were doing, treating their texts as “minor works” or showing themselves in photographs with a passive attitude, always seated and seldom looking at the spectator. Change, however, was on the horizon, as we see in Pilar Acosta’s thesis on schematic art (Acosta, 1968). Even though she did not publish on Levantine art, P. Acosta did manage to secure a non-temporary job as a university professor in 1975.

### 3. 1975-2000: NEW REFLECTIONS ON FEMALE ICONOGRAPHY IN LEVANTINE ART DURING A PERIOD OF CHANGE

Unlike their earlier counterparts, the female students from the late 1970s and especially the 1980s onward were exposed to role models of women with some power at the university; that is, their professors included an increasing number of women with permanent posts and female chairs. The first woman to reach the top post of chair in the field of prehistory was Ana María Muñoz Amilibia in 1974, after 20 years of lecturing. She was followed by Pilar Acosta in 1981 and just one year later by the very young Pilar Utrilla Miranda. These three chairs occupied by women were just the harbinger of many more to come, such that 31% of the prehistory and archaeology chairs were occupied by women in the tally made in 1993 (Díaz-Andreu, 2002a, p. 66). This radical transformation was due to a historical circumstance: the massive influx of the baby-boomers into the university; that is, the generation born between 1957 and 1977 was reaching higher education 20 years later, sparking an urgent need for faculty which meant that the usual filters used to hire staff were not being applied. The broader atmosphere also influenced this change: International Women’s Year was held in 1975, which in Spain was still viewed from a conservative vantage point (Díaz-Silva, 2009; Camino, 2020), and importantly, the return to democracy signalled the restoration of women’s vote in 1978 and legal equality. Despite this more favourable climate, between the late 1970s and the end of the century, virtually none of the women who reached permanent university positions wrote on topics related to women of the past. The exceptions were the group at the Autonomous University of Barcelona led by Encarna Sanahuja, which we shall discuss below, and María Ángeles Querol (1998 and 2000) right at the end of this period. This absence was offset by the texts written by other male and female researchers trained in prehistoric archaeology, although generally speaking, women seldom managed to find a professional home in the discipline, even if their scholarly work was extensive, regular and at a high standard. Examples include Anna Alonso (along with Alexandre Grimal), Concepción Martínez Murillo and

Miguel Ángel Mateo Saura, the four researchers we shall discuss next who wrote on female figures in Levantine art but did not do so from feminist stances. Because she did not analyse the representations of women, in this section we shall not discuss Purificación Atrián Jordán, another woman who occasionally published on Levantine rock art (Atrián Jordán and Berges, 1966; Atrián Jordán and Almagro Gorbea, 1976; see Barciela and Lillo, 2022).

#### 3.1 Anna Alonso and Alexandre Grimal

In 1993, in what can be regarded as a magnificent synthesis work, though published in a journal with a small readership, Anna Alonso and Alexandre Grimal began by alluding to the fact that the previous literature had always chosen a repetitive array of female motifs. They presented an inventory of 74 figures from 33 different sites and described them in some detail. Like all authors before them, they linked this art to hunter-gatherers and dated Levantine art to the Epipalaeolithic, in this way opposing to the new proposals about its Neolithic chronology. The authors noted that the morphological solutions used by the (presumably male) artists were limited and less creative than those used for male representations, although they also sought to depict individual features. They indicated that the skirt was the most common identifying feature (it is found in 97% of the motifs), and they created a typology of skirts. They also analysed the heads and noted that, according to their statistics, almost 63% of the heads in their sample were triangular. They further noted that what distinguished them from the male figures was the absence of caps or additional headpieces. They then analysed the composition and scenes (confirming the high frequency of pairs), and in their final analysis they noted that the main motifs in Levantine art were men (especially archers) and animals (a range of them), but not women, and that this echoes the almost exclusive role of men in hunting in hunter-gatherer societies. In this sense, they rejected the idea that the female figures were representations of goddesses, but they did concede that they had a symbolic value (Alonso and Grimal, 1993). This long text, whose value was diminished because it was published in a very local journal, was followed shortly thereafter by another more informative article (Alonso and Grimal, 1995) which cited the previous one but was the only one that subsequent studies referred to until 2002, unquestionably due to the difficulty of accessing the other much more comprehensive original work.

#### 3.2 Concepción Martínez Murillo

The next researcher to examine female figures in Levantine art was C. Martínez Murillo, who worked with the representations from the Gil Carles archive (Cruz Berrocal et al., 2005). This is a photographic corpus of 127 shelters with Levantine rock art made by the photographer Fernando Gil Carles (1915-1980) between 1971 and 1976, which also includes tracings of figures, sketches and site maps. Of all the shelters, she only found

female representations in 24 of them (Martínez Murillo, 1997, p. 10). In the database she created, the author indicated that there were 78 females, 4.4% of the total motifs, and she suggested a typology, although she did not specify which figures fit into each type. She, too, presented a typology of skirts. The economic activities that made these representations stand apart, according to the author, were collecting, crop and livestock farming and fishing – she was the only one to notice this last motif. These activities were joined by dancing, and she noted that some women were involved in social scenes, like conversation (Martínez Murillo, 1997). Although she did not explicitly make any reference to the chronology of Levantine art, the allusion to crops clearly pointed to the Neolithic.

### 3.3 Miguel Ángel Mateo Saura

We shall now skip over a few studies that we will cite in the next section because they were conducted from openly feminist or gender positions, which the author we shall now discuss, M.Á. Mateo Saura, a staunch supporter of the pre-Neolithic chronology, regarded as wrong and baseless. He accepted the questions that were raised in them, such as the fact that the supposed male authorship of the art might not be so clear, although he seemed to sustain this idea while acknowledging that the authorship would be impossible to verify (Mateo Saura, 2001-2002, p. 8-10). Even though his stated intention was to go beyond mere iconography, in the study he described the anatomical parts, clothing, decorative items, hairstyles and objects associated with the female figures, once again focusing on the issue of pairs and describing the scenes, in which he highlighted gathering, an activity that he later interpreted as a representation of the myths of the periodic renewal of nature. He got down to particulars by stating that the dancing scene from Barranco de los Grajos was shamanic and that an elongated element represented the World Tree, based on Mircea Eliade's proposals (Mateo Saura, 2001-2002, p. 19-20). To counter the criticism of androcentrism levelled by Trinidad Escoriza and Margarita Díaz-Andreu (see below), M.Á. Mateo Saura (2001-2002, p. 21) stated that:

“It is true that in these groups of hunters and gatherers, the overall social organisation revolves around the figure of the man, such that with just a handful of exceptions, the primary forms of kinship are those in which the band shows a patrilocal organisation with a virilocal marital residence by virtue of which the woman joins her husband's band when she gets “married” and their children grow up and are raised in the paternal band (Service, 1973).”

Perhaps influenced by Trinidad Escoriza's publications on maintenance activities (see below), he added:

“While still participating in the group's economic life, women performed other no less important functions, such as motherhood, childcare and their very active participation in the socialisation of adolescents, which they often shared with the father, which also gave them greater clout within the community” (Mateo Saura, 2001-2002, p. 21).

In any case, he interpreted the association of two female figures or figures comprised of a female and a male as hierogamy or holy marriages, and we believe he was the first to focus attention on holy pairs of females, although he also conceded that they might be the symbolisation of the “two phases in the female life cycle, the sign of virginity and the maternal instinct” (Mateo Saura, 2001-2002, p. 23).

M. A. Mateo Saura was not the only researcher skeptical of the criticism of androcentric bias (see next section). One clear example is the interpretation of the upper scene on the frieze in Cingle de Palanques-Shelter A (Castellón) by Norberto Mesado. As this author explains:

“Behind him, diminutive – not even waist-high – we see ‘his’ wife, the only female figure in this pictorial narration. She appears almost as yet another trophy of such a prominent figure. She is depicted slightly crouching, with her arms folded and her hands crossed over her slender abdomen, a clear attitude of submissiveness and ineffectualness in such an eminently virile scene in which women are always relegated to the background” (Mesado, 1995, p. 25).

## 4. 1990-2020: VISIONS FROM FEMINISM AND GENDER ARCHAEOLOGY

Somewhat later yet partly chronologically overlapping with the studies discussed in the previous section, a series of reflections on the female figure in Levantine art surfaced in the 1990s from women who openly declared themselves feminists, although they perceived this affinity in very different ways. Specifically, we want to highlight the work of Trinidad Escoriza, Carme Olària, Margarita Díaz-Andreu (one of the authors of this article) and María Lillo. We believe these four authors can be grouped even though the first two upheld a militant feminism, while the latter two found it easier to work within gender archaeology (to which Escoriza and Olària explicitly opposed) reflecting a more conciliatory feminism. According to the last of these four researchers:

“Unlike authors like C. Olària and T. Escoriza, my intention is to undertake an interpretation not focused on inequality or asymmetry but on complementarity between the sexes” (Lillo, 2014, p. 868).

This distinction between the authors is marked by the influence of the second-wave feminist movement in the first two. A series of feminist movements emerged in the radicalised climate of the 1970s, such as the Catalan Women's Association (1976) and the Feminist Party (1979), one of the founders of which was Encarna Sanahuja, a professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Escoriza et al., 2015b). Through her, militant feminism spread among her direct or indirect disciples, like T. Escoriza, and its importance in the discussion of issues like the “patriarchy” became patent. This contrasts with the latter two's interest in at least considering the possibility of third genders within the society that produced

Levantine art, even though both reached the conclusion that while this possibility could not be discarded, there was no evidence clearly pointing to it. M. Díaz-Andreu and M. Lillo also entertained the prospect that Levantine art might have been a male language and that fewer women are represented for this reason. If this had been the case this did not have to be because of a supposed inequality, but perhaps because women had an alternative way of expressing themselves perhaps in stories, songs, tree art, fibre art or countless other cultural guises that leave no archaeological trace.

#### 4.1 Trinidad Escoriza

The first of the four authors discussed in this section is T. Escoriza; after her early research into symbolic representations from the Chalcolithic in southeast Spain, she shifted towards the topic of women and condemned the gender bias in past studies. She further proposed that “as other disciplines have been doing for decades, archaeology should also contribute to ensuring that women cease to be viewed as neutral subjects with little capacity for action and decision” (Escoriza, 1995, p. 146). Influenced by the Marxist and feminist debates which were underway at that time with E. Sanahuja, Assumpció Vila and other authors at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Escoriza et al., 2015b), and well-versed in the leading publications being issued in the English-speaking world, she argued that the division of labour is more proven in pre-capitalist societies and reproduction is a phenomenon influenced by social control. She stated:

“A materialist approach to gender studies should view women as the subjects in their own stories, not as what men have done with them. We should weigh the nature of the existing social gender differentiation, whether or not forms of manipulation, coercion, exploitation of one gender by another, etc., can be found and how this may be expressed via the material culture. Along with this, we should define, if possible, the place that both genders occupied in the different production and reproduction processes, that is, whether or not there was a social division of labour, the identification and assimilation of specific work instruments for either gender, control over material resources by both, etc.” (Escoriza, 1995, p. 147).

Reflecting on the issue of the authorship of the art and criticising the fact that it had always been assumed to be by males, her militant side emerged:

“If there is a struggle and a way to conduct research that strives to have a greater social scope in terms of the researcher’s social and political commitment to the discourse they generate on the representations of the societies they are studying, and which can therefore at certain points strive to be anti-racist and anti-class, seeking the signs that may enable us to evaluate the exploitation of certain social groups by others, why can this not be anti-sexist as well?” (Escoriza, 1995, p. 148).

And she further stated that:

“Perhaps introducing themes that examine problems related to women into archaeology has had much more to

do with the actual experience of some women who began to hold prominent academic positions in an essentially androcentric milieu. They have usually had a harder time reaching positions of trust and responsibility, which has at times influenced their prestige as professionals, or they have even had to ‘prove’ that they were able to conduct their work as researchers much more than men. It is also essential to deconstruct the traditional scholarly discourse on women, yet without aiming to take on male roles or to emulate our male colleagues” (Escoriza, 1995, p. 149).

This article was followed by another one on Levantine art published in a journal on women’s history, *Arenal*, the ensuing year. After revisiting some of the issues dealt with in the previous article, she stated that her intention was not to create inventories but to view women “in relation to the society in which they were produced” (Escoriza, 1996, p. 10), a society in which agriculture was present (Escoriza, 1996, p. 17). She was critical of the fact that the active economic role associated with male representations had been taken as the basis of a division of labour established by the researchers *a priori*, and that this contrasted with women’s association with ludic activities without regarding their jobs of gathering, honey-collecting, childcare and dancing as active (Escoriza, 1996, p. 15, 19). She considered the classification of women by the presence of skirts, breasts and prominent buttocks and the identification of asexual figures as male as misogynistic (Escoriza, 1996, p. 17).

T. Escoriza revisited this topic in several subsequent studies, including a book (Escoriza, 2002), which she began by stating that “the consolidation and legitimisation of the patriarchy has entailed the nullification of female genealogies throughout the history of humanity” (Escoriza, 2002, p. 1). She introduced the concept of maintenance activities, thus linking up with an entire group of Spanish feminist archaeologists who were reflecting on this concept (Picazo, 1995; Curià and Masvidal, 1998; González Marcén et al., 2005; Pedro Michó, 2006; Sánchez Romero and Aranda Jiménez, 2006). She expressed her disagreement with the fact that gender archaeology considered the possibility of more genders than male and female and therefore, she claimed that “the discourse of gender is somehow still ‘conspiring’ to maintain the non-existence of an objective condition of sexual difference throughout history, and therefore feeding a clearly patriarchal discursive axis” (Escoriza, 2002, p. 6).

The author was surprised at what she did not find, namely everything related to women’s reproductive activities (she did not accept the handful of supposedly pregnant female figures suggested by the literature) and therefore condemned the fact that the female activity of producing bodies remained hidden, which, T. Escoriza claimed, indicated control over women (2002, p. 76). This cancellation of women by the patriarchal ideology also occurred with women at the end of their life cycle (2002, p. 60). She suggested that women were in fact present in hunting scenes, (albeit without weapons, 2002, p. 62-65), although she believed that scenes of gathering and animal riding were indeterminate, and that grazing scenes were

divided between women and asexual figures. In addition, women were responsible for carrying bags and maintaining the subjects, and in a Neolithic context in which archaeology posits that the population was increasing, led her to note that this concealment of female labour, especially in relation to reproduction, was taking place at a time in history when women must have been having more children and when food production, processing and preparation work necessarily had to increase, a job that T. Escoriza assumed was done by women. She suggested that Levantine rock art was the “expression of the patriarchal ideology of a group of hunter/gatherers” (2002, p. 136) and perhaps also of communities that may have been crop or livestock farmers or have combined these activities with hunting and gathering, but who attached importance to hunting as the most symbolically prestigious activity. In either case, she noted that the patriarchal ideology would have legitimised coercive power over women (2002, p. 137). To avoid an overly lengthy discussion, here we shall not examine the author’s subsequent works, in which she continued to further flesh out her ideas (Escoriza, 2006, 2008 and 2011; Escoriza et al., 2015a).

#### 4.2 Carme Olària

The second author who writes from an openly feminist position is Carme Olària. She was the director of the Seminar on Feminist Research, which became the Feminist University Institute at the University Jaume I of Castellón ([www.if.uji.es](http://www.if.uji.es)) in 2009. C. Olària published her first article on the analogy between natural cycles and women and their connection with the myth of creation, presenting the myth of the murdered goddess, Mother Earth, the Goddess Earth, the Goddess Moon and ancient female power in 1999 (Olària, 1999). This article was complemented one year later with another one in which she returned to mythology in relation to Levantine art that, at this time, she dated to the early Neolithic stages (Olària, 2000, p. 35). Following disparate criteria, she distinguished between solitary women, pairs of women, women with animals, women with baskets or bundles and women gatherers. She also created a typology between those depicted in profile and frontwards, yet this does not seem to lead her to any conclusion. On the other hand, however, she does interpret certain scenes as mythological representations, and she states that two is the holy number par excellence, which would explain the pairs of females. She also expressed her support that the scene in Cogul that many interpreted as dancing, in which pairs of women are gathered around an ithyphallic man and a bull (which she views as a symbol of masculinity), leads her “with even more confidence to believe that we are witnessing a fertility initiation scene, with a symbolic expression of both sexual principles” (Olària, 2000, p. 46). In another study, in addition to repeating the aforementioned ideas she also interpreted the Venus of La Valltorta from Covetes del Puntal, as well as the Venus of Cova Alta del Llidoner, as child-bearing women, and she even seems to

glimpse another figure behind the one documented in the first site, although she admits that only a smudge can be seen (Olària, 2006, p. 61). Given that “until quite recently, birth was an act reserved exclusively for women’s eyes” (2006, p. 65), she assumes that the authors of these paintings are female. She later fleshed out all these ideas in a book (Olària, 2011).

#### 4.3 Margarita Díaz-Andreu

Margarita Díaz-Andreu, published in the proceedings of the “Congress of the Neolithic in the Iberian Peninsula” (Valencia, 1999) a study in which she examined human representations in Levantine art from the gender archaeology perspective. She criticised the traditional approaches of viewing the universal nature of gender relations, using Western stereotypes to deduce an inequality in them and considering the authors male. The author warned of the difficulties entailed in the relationship between gender and sex, the problems involved in interpreting scenes whose referent may have been a now-vanished mythical world and the difficulty of trying to make facile interpretations of an art which actually spans several hundreds or even thousands of years and extends across a considerable geographic territory. She suggested three hypotheses which she believed were equally feasible: the first referred to the fact that the high number of asexual individuals might lead us to believe that the representation of gender was irrelevant in the message that the art sought to convey, as both (if there were just two) were equally important in society. The second hypothesis took quite a different turn, as it suggested that Levantine art might have been a male art, an art which men might have used to represent their own world and negotiate their gender position in society, thus silencing women, appropriating the representation of the human body as the male body and only superficially depicting women’s activities. The third hypothesis was not the complete opposite of the second but expanded its angle of vision by considering the possibility that some places were female ritual spaces, a hypothesis which could be confirmed, for example, by a study of landscapes and iconographies to determine whether the location or characteristics of the sites where female figurations or certain types of them were painted are different to the others (Díaz-Andreu, 1999). In a subsequent study, somewhere between the second and third hypotheses, she leaned towards the second one, although she left open the possibility of the third one. She regarded Levantine art from these zones as male due to the high frequency of hunting scenes and the association of large game hunting with males in hunter-gatherer societies (Díaz-Andreu, 2002b, p. 170). As the author explained:

“I propose that men in the prehistoric past appropriated the ‘neutral’ representation of the human figure in Levantine art to portray themselves. This must surely have affected the way in which men and women perceived the landscape. The ritualization of the landscape (or the emphasis on its ritual character) through rock-art was mostly connected to the men’s world. Women lived

through it, and probably ritualized it through different means” (Díaz-Andreu, 2002b, p. 170-171).

Even though these conclusions referred to her case study – Villar del Humo and Albarracín – she admitted that restricted access for certain groups of society regardless of their gender may even have been seen in some sites, and that some women might have been allowed in due to this very exclusivity of access. Despite this, the author repeated that:

“The majority of sites, however, probably either remained accessible only to men or were significant only for them. The rock-art’s ritual meaning, therefore, remained fundamentally masculine” (Díaz-Andreu, 2002b, p. 171).

#### 4.4 María Lillo

In 2014, M. Lillo presented her doctoral thesis on *La imagen de la mujer en el arte prehistórico del Arco Mediterráneo de la Península Ibérica* (“the image of women in prehistoric art in the Mediterranean Arc of the Iberian Peninsula”) at the university of Alicante. In it, she dated Levantine art in the Neolithic and created an inventory of figures based on her readings of publications, review of recordings, and site visits, where she identified 188 representations located in 72 shelters. By doing so, she sought to “bring to light the women represented in Levantine art and their activities” (Lillo, 2014, p. 33, see, too, p. 18). She noted that there are more male figures (1315, 1073 of which are archers) than indeterminate anthropomorphs (496) and women (188), and that there is virtually the same number of shelters where there is a majority of men (22) or asexual figures (21), which outnumber those where there is a majority of women (only 9 shelters; Lillo, 2014, p. 273-274). According to this author, the goal was not to “invert the stereotypes, that is, to strive to find that women hunted or engaged in war or that the patriarchal power was instated after an idyllic primordial matriarchy” (Lillo, 2014, p. 283). Her detailed inventory enabled her to systematise issues of anatomy, hairstyles, clothing, adornments and associated objects, and the activities with which they were associated, including maintenance activities, which are production and reproduction:

“Feeding and food processing; public caregiving, hygiene and health; setting up and organising the domestic space; socialisation of children; and textile manufacturing” (Lillo, 2014, p. 867).

M. Lillo’s doctoral thesis was a praiseworthy effort to reconsider female figures after having visited many of the sites to check what had been published about them.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have reviewed the most important publications that have analysed the issue of women in Levantine art and attempted to connect this with the historical period in which they were written. Until the

mid-twentieth century, only men had published on Levantine art, and only two of them spoke more extensively about female representations. The first was the Marquis of Cerralbo in a text lacking a purely academic purpose – a prologue – and therefore he did not properly measure his words and inadvertently revealed what must have been the more conventional mindset in Spain at that time (1915): the ideal woman was chaste, modest, beautiful, motherly and devout. The second author, Juan Bautista Porcar, wrote two decades later, and even though his contribution is quite limited in length, it is sufficient to reveal that it runs in the same vein as the earlier text. The first women who managed to join the world of archaeology at the time, initially as students and later as professionals, did not devote themselves to rock art – a pursuit that requires fieldwork, which was usually off-limits to women during this period – and instead tended to take refuge in museums, something that also occurred around the rest of Europe.

The first women to get involved in studying rock art did so just before or after the Spanish Civil War, and they were all the family members of a famous male archaeologist who supported them, although none of them continued in this field. The work of the pioneer Encarnación Cabré Aguiló focused on palaeolithic art, and therefore we have only mentioned it in passing. The second one, Maria Luisa Vilaseca, never managed to become the author of the publications related to her work, although she was cited in them. Julia Sánchez Carrilero did manage to publish, yet she apologised for the fact that what she had written was a “minor work”. Of the three, only the second became a paid professional. Therefore, in terms of Levantine rock art, this era is essentially a continuation of the previous one in that those who undertook more in-depth reflections on this topic were all men, and the university chairs Martín Almagro and Antonio Beltrán were those who reflected on female figures.

We see that only when women’s rights were reinstated in the transition to democracy after 1975, when women regained the right to vote and legal equality between men and women was stipulated, did a few professionals from younger generation emerge, two women and two men – Anna Alonso along with Alexandre Grimal, and Concepción Martínez Murillo and Miguel Ángel Mateo Saura – who focused their analyses on female representations. This means not that any of them declared themselves feminists but that the atmosphere in those years led them to fruitfully examine topics that had not seemed so important in the past, namely everything related to women.

Those same years also witnessed the explosion of second-wave feminism in Spain. This is the context in which, parallel to the aforementioned authors, albeit somewhat later, as the impact has only been felt from the 1990s until today, a series of female authors – this time clearly feminist – returned to the topic of female representations to examine the prehistoric women they represented. They either adopted a more militant stance (Trinidad Escoriza and Carme Olària) or did not (Margarita Díaz-Andreu and

Maria Lillo), perhaps more related to the third and fourth waves of feminism. The contrast between the former and latter two may be the somewhat less extreme feminism of the 1990s and 2000s in the latter two. They all seek to give women back their importance in the prehistoric narrative, but the latter believe that rock art may not necessarily be the best means of grasping the vast range of activities and customs that must have existed in relation to women. It is clear that fewer women are represented in Levantine art than men, but the latter believe that this does not necessarily mean that women were the victims of a patriarchal, oppressive society; instead, without rejecting the possibility of inequality outright, we should consider the possibility that what is represented is gender complementarity because painting may not have been a female means of expression by *antonomasia* in Levantine communities, and therefore it may not be the best way of examining the world of women at that time.

After this selective review of female figures in Levantine rock art, we might ask what remains to be done. We believe that several questions still remain unanswered, such as whether the location, number and activities of the female figures changed over different periods and sub-styles, given the new chronologies recently created by different authors. Once a timeline is established, it would also be interesting to check whether the types of shelters and their locations changed over the different periods, or whether there was some concordance between the presence of certain scenes and women to check the third hypothesis posited by M. Díaz-Andreu in 1999. These are just several possibilities that show that work remains to be done on the Levantine representations of women. By trying to apply some of the new feminist concepts to these questions, we could say that the study of prehistoric female representations has to be “decolonised”. One of the issues that has been mentioned throughout the article for each author has been the chronology they believed these motifs to be dated, but it should be said that whatever dating is chosen, Palaeolithic, Mesolithic/Epipaleolithic or Neolithic, this has not affected the discussion. This leads us to consider that rock art shelters – and the female figures within them – should cease being considered mere points in a neutral, timeless territory. Instead, we would like to argue that scholars should try to contextualise them within their cultural landscape and, importantly, within their historical period. The messages displayed were influenced by the materiality of the geographic context but, at the same time, what was painted influenced societies – and gender relations – and made them change over time.

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## NOTES

- (1) He goes into somewhat further detail in the next article, explaining that “on their knees they are wearing an adornment represented by two downward convergent lines, one on either side of their legs, like the half-body garment of the bison hunter with a schematic design” (Breuil and Cabré Aguiló, 1909, p. 16).
- (2) He is referring to G. W. Stow, 1905, p. 118-119.
- (3) From his memoirs, one can glean that the person who actually excavated was his colleague from the Archaeology Service, Josep Colomines, along with Josep de Calasañç Serra Ràfols (Bosch Gimpera, 1980, p. passim).
- (4) “y *conografía*” (sic, misspelling of “iconography”) in the original.
- (5) This is proven by the fact that one of the few women who actually taught, Olimpia Arocena, had to leave her post in 1966 due to her need for a higher salary for personal reasons.

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